

Concord

A shrill cackle echoed down from the tallest tower in the castle of Concord, waking Bandy with a start. He groaned and clapped his hands over his pointed ears, his head still foggy with sleep. He cracked open his eyes to the brilliant glare of the rising sun and swung his legs out of bed with a wide yawn. Another cackle pierced the morning air and Bandy walked over to the window to peer irritably out at the Sorcerer's tower.

The Sorcerer had taken up residence in the tower some years before by the king's order, and it was rumored that he hadn't left it since. Every so often a colorful explosion would burst in the sky, or a mystical figure would swoop down from the barred window set in the top of the tower. Bandy was more than a little wary of the Sorcerer, and as a result he tried to steer clear of the delicate tower that rose like a spindle into the cloudless sky.

A bell clanged loudly from the belltower signaling the start of breakfast and Bandy hurriedly withdrew his head from the window. He jogged out of his bedroom, tugging on his tunic as he went and narrowly missed running into a hairy dwarf on his way down the stairs. He took a shortcut through the scullery to reach the dining room as fast as he could. His stomach was rumbling loudly, and he was loath to miss breakfast for the second time in a week.

He arrived panting in the servant's dining room just as the castle's chef began passing out freshly buttered rolls and Bandy heaved a sigh of relief. He reached for a glistening roll, saliva moistening his mouth, but a heavyset ogre stepped in his path.

“You Elf! Message for the Sorcerer.” He grunted, thrusting a roll of parchment at Bandy’s chest.

“What-me?” Bandy gaped at the troll, who nodded brusquely and tromped off. Bandy bit his lip, looking longingly at the tray of soft bread. By the time he finished delivering the message to the Sorcerer, breakfast would be long over. However, disobeying an order was punishable by a severe beating, and could even include missing *all* of the day’s meals- not just breakfast. With another sigh, this one of disappointment, he turned and left the dining hall.

The tall tower somehow fit eight flights of stairs into its slender walls and it took Bandy several minutes to even reach the iron bound door that led to the Sorcerer’s personal quarters. This gave Bandy plenty of time to worry about what he was going to do when the Sorcerer answered his knock. Might the Sorcerer be in a bad mood? Would the Sorcerer curse him? Maybe even push him down the stairs headfirst?

By the time he was standing before the massive door he could feel beads of sweat rolling down his forehead- and not just because of the long climb. With a shaking hand, Bandy knocked on the Sorcerer’s door.

There was no noise from within. Bandy waited for several long seconds before knocking again. This time he waited a full minute to make sure he could hear absolutely nothing from inside. He certainly didn’t want to antagonize the Sorcerer any more than he had to. He knocked one last time, and then, gathering his resolve, he put a hand on the door and pushed. It swung open on silent hinges, and Bandy froze in the doorway.

Colorful gadgets assaulted his eyes and a strange bird in the corner piped shrilly out of the open window. Bandy peered around and took a cautious step into the room. There was no one in sight. He edged carefully through the mess of bubbling mixtures, but it seemed that the Sorcerer was gone.

Bandy felt his shoulders relax. He could tell the ogre that the Sorcerer simply was not in! With any luck, when the Sorcerer came back, someone else would be charged with delivering the message. He turned around and stopped short.

A huge glittering doorway stood embedded in the wall of the tower. It was right next to the actual door, which was why Bandy had not noticed it earlier.

But that was impossible! There was no place for the sparkling doorway to lead! Yet it was so mesmerizing...

Bandy took a step toward it, and then another, heedless of the delicate instruments in the room. He brushed past them, unable to tear his eyes away from the doorway. The door was wide open, inviting him to step through into the swirling purple light beyond. Light winked in and out like the stars in a clear night sky.

Bandy took another step and found himself right in front of the door. He reached out a tentative hand and touched it.

A flare of light burst from the doorway, enveloping him and pulling him in. He tried to cry out, but his voice was suffocated by the light. He could hear the door close behind him, locking him in the nowhere. Bandy tried to kick at the door, but he could no longer see it. The purple

light beamed at him from all sides. Then blackness crowded into his vision like thick felt pulled over a window. He tried to struggle, but his arms fell limp as the blackness prevailed and he was whisked along by the surging purple light.

Bandy slowly returned to consciousness as the sun, the glorious sun, spilled red across his eyelids. He opened his eyes a slit and stared up at the glaring sun that gleamed straight above his head. He sat up slowly, feeling a slight resistance as leaves snagged and snapped around him. He opened his eyes slowly and found himself embedded deep in a tall rose bush.

Bandy froze. A rose bush. He squeezed his eyes closed, expecting to be savaged from all sides by the cruel thorns. Nothing happened. Uncertainly, Bandy opened his eyes again and looked about. He was in an unfamiliar garden. Tall trees stretched luxuriously in the slight breeze, bearing fruit that Bandy had never seen before. A stream burbled contentedly through the garden, disappearing into the tall flowering hedge that surrounded the garden.

What had happened? One second, he had been in the Sorcerer's rooms, and then the purple door...

Bandy bit his lip. He needed to find people to figure out where he was. Why had he gone through the doorway in the first place! What if he was trapped here forever! Bandy's stomach clenched, and he stood up a little shakily. Still, he felt no pain from thorns ripping into his skin. He caught a slender stem in his hand and inspected it. No thorns.

Was this a thornless rosebush? Brandy frowned. Surely that was impossible! Brandy shook his head and stepped out of the bush. It was clear that he had been transported by the doorway to another land, but which kingdom grew thornless rosebushes? Was it the gnome's kingdom? He had heard that it was lovely enough, but it was a long way from his home in Concord.

His train of thought was cut off abruptly as he caught sight of a small castle. Maybe it was the local duke's residence? Brandy walked up and rapped on the door.

He heard footsteps inside the house, and then the door was flung open.

Bandy stared. The figure standing in the doorway was too tall to be a dwarf or a gnome and didn't have the signature pointed ears or high cheekbones of an elf. It was too skinny to be an ogre, and decidedly did not look to be a Sorcerer.

Bandy did the only thing he could think of and ran. Down the steps, through the gate, into a vast treeless maze of tall gray buildings, and out into a long strip of - blackened hardened dirt with yellow dots down the middle?

Suddenly a giant carriage rushed towards Brandy, who had a second to wonder if it was out of control when it swerved wildly, the driver cursing blackly at him. Three more followed and a then steady stream of them appeared over a hill from the opposite direction. A horn blared above a cacophony of screeching noises. Brandy squinted as the next one rushed by. Where were the horses that pulled them?

Back at the house, the woman named Ellen stared at the little dirt smeared figure stumbling out of the road. Definitely not someone from the thirtieth century. She turned and walked back inside to wake her husband.

Tirimere was shaken out of a peaceful dream by soft hands on his shoulders.

“What is it?” He mumbled.

“There’s a strange character out by the road that I think you’d like to meet.” His wife whispered. The scientist snapped fully awake.

“Now?” He asked. His wife chuckled.

“Yes dear.”

Bandy was crouched in the bushes on the edge of the black strip, his eyes darting back and forth as he watched the horseless carriages zoom by. Maybe someone would stop. But what if everyone was like the figure in the house? He had never heard of anyone like that. Where was he?

Stomping footsteps jerked him around, and he saw another one of the figures striding towards him. This one was a bit taller, with friendly eyes and a bushy beard. He was wearing a long white cloak and shiny black shoes.

Bandy squeaked and rose to his feet, backing away from the figure. The figure stopped and held out his hands in a placating gesture. “Who are you?” the figure breathed in awe.

“My-my name’s Bandy, s-sir” Bandy stuttered. The figure’s eyes widened.

“You can understand me!” He exclaimed. Bandy swallowed, eyeing the pleased figure with wariness.

“There’s no need to be afraid. I’m a scientist.” The figure saw Bandy’s look of confusion. He smiled. “You’re not from here, are you? I’m a human. The name’s Tirimere. The question is, who are you?”

“B-Bandy, f-from Concord” Bandy whispered. Tirimere gasped.

“Inter-Parallel-Universe Travel!” he grinned. Bandy frowned. A Parallel Universe? What was that? Tirimere smiled brightly at Bandy. “Please, come with me! I can help you get home!” Bandy nodded vigorously. At least home was something that he could understand.

Bandy followed the scientist back to the house at a trot. The scientist muttered to himself as they entered the house and walked down the hall. He entered a room and Bandy’s eyes opened wide. It looked almost exactly like the Sorcerer’s tower. There was even a hawk in a giant cage in the corner.

Tirimere was talking briskly now.

“I’ve been working on this project for some time. The physics involved is insane! But I’ve got a doorway to another universe. Of course, it won’t open from this side, only the other. But you came down on my property, so there’s a good chance that you came through this portal. It might just open back up for you...” The Scientist smiled, “And if I can keep it open it’d be a major breakthrough in the world of science.”

Bandy's head was spinning, trying to follow what the Scientist was saying, but it was hopeless.

"All you need to do is just step through this door!" The scientist gestured at a closed door in the wall.

Bandy stepped towards it, hands shaking. He couldn't wait to get out of this strange place with Humans roaring by in their horseless carriages. Even his dull home was preferable to this!

Bandy grabbed the handle and turned. The door opened slowly, and the scientist's gasp registered dimly in Bandy's mind. All he saw was the purple light sparkling at him and pulling him closer. He touched the light and the brilliant white flare washed over him. This time he did not struggle, knowing that he was going home. The last thing he saw before the blackness crept over his eyes was the light of the Inter-Parallel portal closing behind him with a snap.